



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

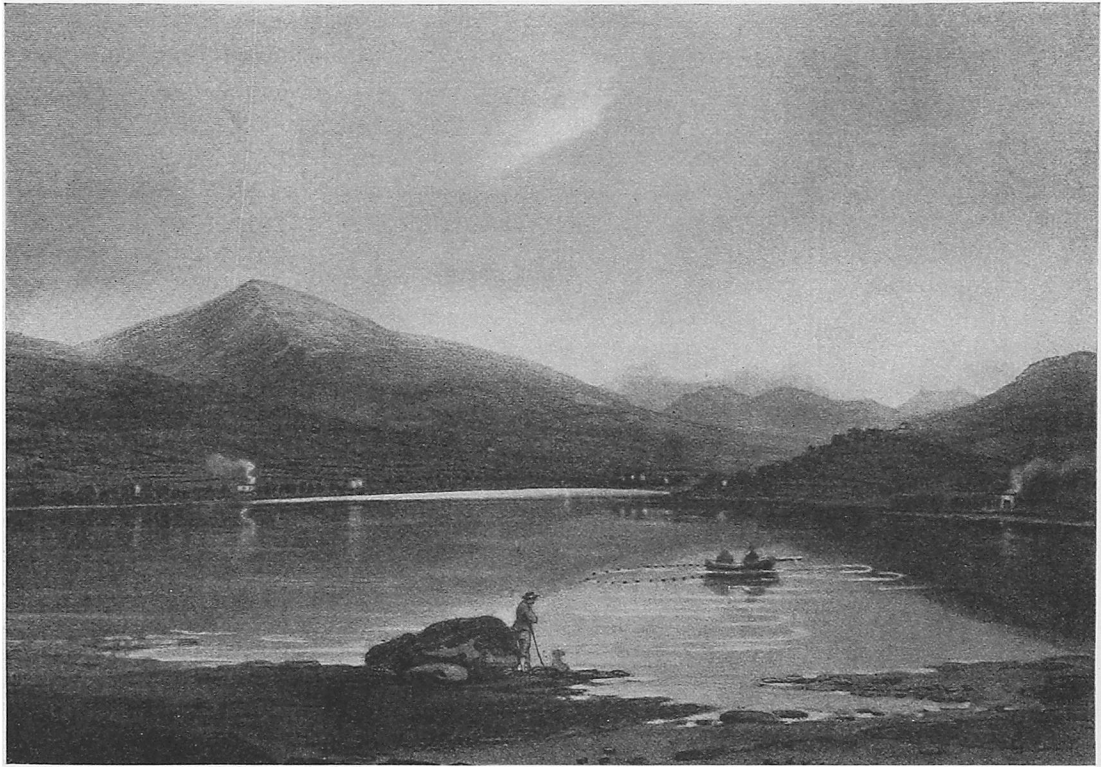
This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



MEZZOTINT
By Thomas Girtin

—Courtesy Carroll Galleries, London

Current Art Topics

By "MAHLSTICK," London Correspondent

(All rights reserved)

AS THE year 1914 drew towards its dark and saddened close, not a few among us cherished the belief that at least we were not destined to hear a second time the angels' song of "Peace on Earth" faint and unheeded amidst the clash and tumult of arms. We hoped against hope that the coming year would close in peace. It was our wishes that fathered the belief, but powerless, alas! to give it birth and reality.

In but few respects, indeed, has the actual issue of events coincided with that so confidently and freely predicted. Who, when the English Expeditionary Force set out for France and Flanders, foresaw its narrow escape from annihilation, or that it would within a year have grown to an army of millions, that England would adopt "compul-

sion"? Who foresaw the tragedies of the Lusitania and Ancona, or Louvain or Ypres? On the other hand, which of us who dreamed that the immediate result of the war—whatever may be its ultimate aftermath—would be such a wave of industrial activity and consequent industrial prosperity as the working classes at least have never known; whether for good or evil finally we need not now discuss.

On the contrary, one and all at the outset prophesied and pictured factories, mills and workshops closed down, whilst hungry men and women roamed the country clamoring for bread or work. These universal forebodings contrast strangely with the feverish prosperity that almost riots through the land.

Only the prevalence of black and khaki

everywhere combats the impression that will sometimes obtrude itself upon us, that we are in the midst of the "piping times of peace"—of a millenium of trade booms. In vain do statesmen, preachers and the press inveigh against the consequent profusion and excess. As at Belshazzar's feast, the writing on the wall goes unheeded through the land.

Lately the art world has, in its turn, begun to be warmed by this spell of unseasonable sunshine, and few, I think, will grudge the painters a place in it. Exhibitors and dealers in the manufacturing districts have had quite a good time. Things are still quiet in London, but two exhibitions opened with the New Year, both appropriate, though in very different ways, to the times and the season. An exhibition of paintings, etchings and drawings by members of "The Artists' Rifles" needs no apology on the score of its aptness to these days of war's alarms; and the Christmas season, fitted like words to music, Arthur Rackham's exhibition of drawings for Dicken's "Christmas Carol." Both exhibitions are housed in the same galleries, but what a gulf separates all that they stand for—the grim actualities of today indicated by pictures from battleship and camp, and the Victorian sentiment of the "Christmas Carol" which breathes the time and spirit of that era with its dream of "universal peace" which was to come about through the operation of such varied panaceas for "human ills" as religious toleration, the teachings and discoveries of science, popular education, free trade, franchise and reform bills, modern drainage and sanitation, teetotalism, railways and steamships, the penny post, a cheap press, etc., etc. With what simplicity it was believed that the millenium was at hand, indeed was inaugurated at the World's Fair in Hyde Park in the Year of Grace eighteen hundred and fifty-one—and today—Armageddon.

Arthur Rackham's drawings suffer inevitably and hopelessly at the outset from the fact that two men of genius, Cruickshank and Phiz, visualized and embodied for all time with the pencil that world and its inhabitants which Dickens with the pen delineated for our delight, so that none of us will ever brook

any variation or departure from the immortal types stamped on them—Pickwick—Pecksniff, Dombey—Quilp, Weller, all that long beloved array. Rackham, despite his marked vein of originality, has perforce to fall into line with these irremovable conceptions, and the most that his drawings give us in addition is some modernity in more decorative design, and some very refined draughtsmanship, but one asks, was it worth while? Mr. Rackham is, as the whole world knows, a most delightful imaginative and original designer, he has in his visions of fairy and goblinland shown us into a world where children and grown-ups alike love to wander. But in his attempt to illustrate the story of Scrooge his originality has been met and thwarted by the ghosts of Cruickshank and Phiz at every turn, and when he manages to get away from them, as in Marley's Wanderings and the "Phantoms" drawing, he is strained and not convincing. But we get his unique and exquisite technique, whilst his color in its dainty restraint has quite a Japanese charm.

A few words about an artist whose work has such a worldwide popularity may be of interest. Outwardly he is of unusually slight physique, with even a faint suspicion of that elfin quaintness which characterizes his drawings, but very alert and alive in all his movements. For some years he was editor of a lady's paper, making occasional ventures into art with pen, ink drawings for the book publishers. Later he joined the "Langham," that famous society I have so often referred to. I quite well remember the two hours' sketch he made as a candidate for election. It represented the solitary "crew" of the "Nancy Brig" sitting alone on a raft amongst the bones of his shipmates, and munching a relic, whether of the captain bold or "the midshipmite" was left to the spectator's discretion. Gruesome as the idea was, yet, as in the poem, one only felt the humor. Thenceforth a regular attendant at the "Friday Night," when many of the finest drawings were designed in these two hours' sittings. His earliest excursion into color was made at them.

Among lost opportunities I must reckon that I could have secured Rackham's draw-

ings then at perhaps ten dollars each, which within a couple of years easily commanded 150 to 200 dollars. His first debut as an exhibitor was at the Leicester Galleries and it made their position, as well as his reputation, just as the first Collings exhibition gave the Carroll Galleries their cachet some years later. The work was a series of drawings for Grimms' Tales, if I remember rightly. On the morning before it opened, the then manager, the lately deceased Ernest Brown, made Rackham a courageous bid—for he was really backing the career of the gallery on his opinion—of 5,000 dollars for the whole series, and Rackham, a young and comparatively unknown man, with equal courage refused it. Within two hours of opening the show, the sales had passed that sum, many drawings passing from buyer to buyer at enhancing prices. His spirit and technique have had many imitators and followers, some like Edmund Dulac and Russell Flint, not unworthy of their exemplar, but the role exemplar in this vein of pictorial imagination, he still maintains against all comers.

Meeting my artist friend, Bernard Gribble, lately, when the news of the Kaiser's illness was bruited about, his manner suggested some sympathetic concern, in so far that before the war he had found in the German Emperor a kind and generous patron of his art, Englishman though he was. It had been his privilege to design the Christmas card for the Emperor's personal use, and memory, he said, would persist, in spite of "strafe and strife" in recalling old kindnesses.

The war this year again seriously damped down the popular vogue for Christmas cards, though the shops made quite a display of them in their windows. The few I have received still remain, as of old, the last tokens of the annual saturnalia, a somewhat melancholy array on table and mantelpiece, as if they had outstayed their welcome and awaited rather depressingly whatever fate has in store for them. To put them ruthlessly into the fire or wastepaper basket seems a harsh destiny for these dainty greetings from friends far and near, yet few can give them house room—it is an annual problem to be solved according to

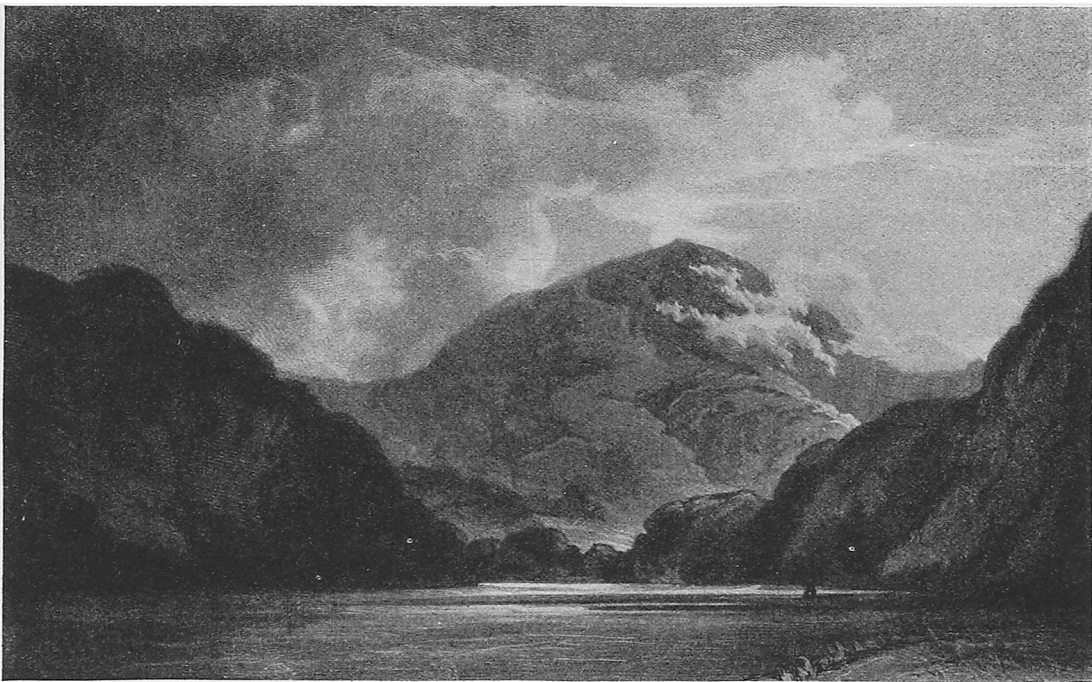
temperament and circumstances. Quite early in their history it became the correct pose for the "superior person" to decry them as a "nuisance and a bore" and most of us have in the past loudly proclaimed our firm intention to give up the custom, but such threats have always turned out to be but empty words. As each Christmas draws near we begin in a weak-minded fashion to remember that the Smythe Thompsons are sure to send us a very expensive card, that the Robinsons—poor things—would feel it if now in their straitened circumstances they did not get one—Tom, out in Manitoba, must certainly have one, and so on till in the end we have sent off the usual batch of greetings to the four corners of the earth. And why not?—the custom is a kindly and a saving one: it can only be for intrinsically good and sufficient reasons that it has survived by more than a generation the first stage of its existence as an interesting novelty. Assuredly nothing else can, with the same grace, and at such small cost and trouble, prove to friends—at one time near and dear—that if under the stress of circumstances time or distance, we are now but little more than a memory to each other, yet it is a memory of which we are loath to loose the last link, whilst a letter may involve explanation or excuses, possibly better left unsaid. And how often has the Christmas card served as the olive branch quietly proffered and quietly accepted, so that grievances and bitterness may steal silently away.

But what an obsession the craze was for a few years. On its waves publishers and artists sprung into notoriety; exhibitions were held of the designs, to which folk flocked as since they have done to the post impressionist, futurist and kindred catchpennies. They were sorted out into sets of every description, musical, military, naval, natural history, historical, etc., etc., the various artistic society sets, such as the Royal Academy series, every set designed by a gentleman with the magic letters R. A. after his name. I doubt if that venture cost the enterprising publishers much under ten thousand dollars for the artists alone. The very heavens seemed to rain commissions on the happy painters, and, of the

"put your own price" order; it was for everyone concerned a busy, humming time—a huge industry sprung into being, which with some vicissitudes has made good down to the present day.

Looking over an old portfolio lately, I came across some mezzotints after Thomas Girtin. A contemporary of Turner, he died at the early age of 27, leaving behind him masterpieces in landscape art which his great rival scarcely surpassed in the finest works of his maturity, as Turner himself was the first to admit! in fact, his own words were, "Had Girtin lived, there would have been no Turner." Contemplating the nobility, the impressiveness, the calm, exalted mood of these drawings so raised above all that is sordid in

the world and in life, and comparing them with many much vaunted phases of modern painting professing to deal with realities—so frequently only a euphemism for the fouler underside of things—many of us marvel at the audacity that labels the descent, as an "evolution" as "progress." The change may be inevitable. Modernity in art, like modernity in costume, may be a necessity of modernity in life, but do not let us fool ourselves into the belief that it is on a higher plane than the art we are here considering, or on the road to it. If it were not for the counteracting trend of the work of such modern idealists as Charles John Collings, Brangwyn, Baird, D. Y. Cameron, and happily many others, we might well be tempted across the latter day scroll of art, to write—Finis.



MEZZOTINT
By Thomas Girtin

—Courtesy Carroll Galleries, London